

VZCZCXRO0185
RR RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHGO RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD RUEHRS RUEHTM
DE RUEHMC #0223/01 1672136
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 162136Z JUN 09
FM AMCONSUL MONTERREY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3775
INFO RHMFISS/HQ USNORTHCOM
RUEHMC/AMCONSUL MONTERREY 9366
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 4846
RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
RUEABND/DEA HQ WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RUEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MONTERREY 000223

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/16/2019
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: CARTELS WRESTLE FOR CONTROL OF DURANGO

REF: A) MONTERREY 0030 B) MONTERREY 0213

MONTERREY 00000223 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Bruce Williamson, Consul General, Monterrey, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. Drug trafficking organizations have transformed the state of Durango into one of the most violent battlegrounds in Mexico. Key institutions such as the church and the press have been terrorized as local civil society finds itself under siege. The number of violent deaths in 2009 will likely exceed the record setting figures seen last year. The public officials are calling for an increased military presence to subdue the violence as local police forces are either corrupted or have simply been overwhelmed. End Summary.

12. (C) Sparsely populated, Durango state is the fourth largest state in terms of territory in Mexico, with much of its 1.5 million in population living in Durango city, the capital. The Sinaloa Drug Cartel has traditionally been the dominant drug trafficking organization in this sleepy state previously known principally for its mining and ranching. (The movie star John Wayne used to own a cattle ranch right outside Durango city and had shot several of his films shot there.) However, beginning in 2007, the Gulf Cartel moved in when it saw the Mexican military squeezing its traditional drug routes in the eastern part of the country. Durango has now essentially become a free-fire area, where the Sinaloa cartel, the Gulf Cartel, and the Juarez Cartel's all compete for control of the highways leading to the border. On June 8, Poloff, A/Legatt, RSO, and Conoff travelled to the city of Durango to meet with the heads of several of the state's law enforcement agencies and discuss the recent wave of violence in the state. Our meetings included sessions with the heads of the Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR), the Federal Secretary of Public Security (SSP), the Interior Ministry's intelligence unit (CISEN), and the State Attorney General's Office (PGJ).

13. (C) Law enforcement officials in the state have not been able to respond to the increase in violent crimes. In a recent news article, Juan Carlos Gutierrez, the PAN party state president described Durango as having separate parallel state governments - one controlled by elected officials and one controlled by drug traffickers - as the traffickers have as much authority to tax and police the state as do the elected officials. The federal government has already identified large parts of the state as 'areas of impunity.' According to statistics provide by Noel Diaz Rodriguez, the state's deputy attorney general, in 2009 through June 5, there were 270 murders related to drug violence but not a single arrest had been made. The state is on track to easily surpass the record 317 drug

related deaths for all of 2008. The state's federal police commander, Ricardo Gonzalez, told us that the local law enforcement is unable to compete with the cartels. Gangs operating in groups of up to 60 men, equipped with automatic weapons and fragmentation grenades, are able to overrun police stations, burn police vehicles, and threaten officers with impunity. This year in the towns of Suchil and Vicente Guerrero, both near the Zacatecas border, the local police forces have quit en masse because of threats made against them.

¶4. (U) While, in the past, members of the drug trafficking organizations were the principal targets of the murders and kidnappings throughout the state, the violence has now started to spill over into the general community. On average three law enforcement officials are assassinated every month. In the last twelve months, three mayors who refused to cooperate with the cartels have been murdered. In the mid-sized town of Ocampo, the assassins not only killed the mayor but also his teenage son. Two reporters, Carlos Ortega Melosamper and Eliseo Barron, have been kidnapped, tortured and killed this year. President Calderon offered a reward of five million pesos for information leading to the people responsible for the murder of Barron, the most recent case. Four days after our visit, the press reported that the Mexican military captured five suspects in the case. It is not known if the reward will be collected.

¶5. (C) Durango made national and international headlines when the Archbishop of Durango, Hector Gonzalez Martinez declared on April 17 that 'everyone' knew Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman Loera, the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, lived in Durango state but the authorities were too corrupt to arrest him. President Calderon and the Attorney General immediately responded by branding the accusations irresponsible and declaring that law enforcement officers did not know where El Chapo was located. A few days later, two undercover military officers were found dead north of the city of Durango with a note that read 'You can't beat El Chapo - not the priest, not the government.' On May 7, the archbishop was stopped and threatened at an illegal checkpoint run by armed gunmen. Since then state's PGR delegado has had to provide the archbishop with an armored car and bodyguards.

MONTERREY 00000223 002.2 OF 002

¶6. (C) Hand in hand with the growing presence of the cartels is the rampant corruption at all levels of the police forces - state, local, and federal. In a conversation with Ramon Ramirez, the local representative of CISEN, Ramirez expressed confidence in the leadership of the police forces but lamented that they did not have control of all of their forces. This was especially true at the state and local level, entities with which CISEN limits the intelligence it provides. Fidel Gutierrez, the former director of the state attorney general's anti-kidnapping unit, agreed that corruption was rampant. As a reflection of the corruption, he added that the citizens of Durango have lost confidence in the local police forces and are no longer reporting crimes. Last year only five kidnapping were reported in the state even though the actual number is many times more.

¶7. (C) In our meetings with the federal police and state security leaders, there was a strong consensus that the Mexican military had to play a larger role. Like many other areas in northern Mexico (see refel B), the Mexican military remains the only trusted government entity. State attorney general Daniel Agustin Garcia said that the police forces are able to handle public security but not the increase in narco-violence. The fact that the military is the only force strong enough to stand up to the cartels was evident in the June 9 death of Israel 'El Paisa' Sanchez Corral (the 'plaza boss' in Durango for El Chapo). The attempt to capture Sanchez resulted in a gun battle with automatic weapons and grenades that required over 200 military and federal police forces by the time the operation had ended.

¶8. (C) Comment: During our short trip to Durango the lawlessness quickly became clear as did the fact that local law

enforcement is not equipped to fight off the cartels. Per capita, Durango has the second highest murder rate in the country. The federal PGR delegado and the state attorney general both welcomed USG assistance in training police officers for anti-kidnapping units, forensics, weapons training, and crime scene investigation - some of which Post A/Legatt will be able to provide. However, real security will not be possible without an increased military presence like that seen in Ciudad Juarez.

19. (C) Comment continued. Complicating security matters even more, Durango has undertaken the difficult task of judicial reform, with a deadline for implementation looming in August of this year. However, as the attorney general's office lacks the personnel and the needed expertise, it is unlikely the state will meet its self imposed deadline. Unlike some states that have tapped their U.S. counterparts on the other side of the border, Durango has not received any outside assistance in either its judicial reform initiative or its push for oral trials. End Comment.

WILLIAMSONB